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Soviet Said to Shift Air Defenses on Missiles

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WASHINGTON, March 24 — The Soviet Union has begun a major reorganization of its air force to improve defense against attack by low-flying American cruise missiles and aircraft, the Pentagon said in a report issued today.

As part of the effort, 1,100 tactical aircraft have been transferred from local commanders on the edges of the Soviet Union to more central national air defense authorities.

The report noted, for example, that the Russians had reduced their force of tactical aircraft near Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and eastern Turkey to 700 planes from the 965 planes that were deployed last year. The report added that this region "currently has low priority for Soviet planners."

Similar aircraft transfers are said to have occurred in other military districts in Asia and Europe.

Annual Pentagon Report

"The rationale may involve a desire for greater centralized control over weapons rather than the flexibility of the local commander in making certain decisions," the report said.

The defensive shift and other new developments were described in the re-

port and in briefings on Monday by senior Defense Department officials who specialize in intelligence issues. The release of the report has become a yearly event here and a key part of the Pentagon's effort to win Congressional approval for increased military spending.

After the report was made public, Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger appeared before the House Armed Services Committee to present the Pentagon's case for a 3 percent increase in military spending, after inflation is taken into account.

In his testimony, Mr. Weinberger said there had been no overall change in the objectives of Soviet military

policy under Mikhail S. Gorbachev, the Soviet leader.

"Regardless of who is general secretary of the Soviet Union and how young he is or how healthy he is or how well he dresses, their policy remains exactly the same," Mr. Weinberger said.

He contended that the Soviet objective was "to acquire an increasing amount of enormous military strength each year, without any restraints imposed by public opinion and public debate."

The new Pentagon assessment said the Soviet Union had increased the number of long-range SS-25 missiles to about 100, and was developing a more accurate version of the medium-range SS-20 missile.

The Pentagon assessments contained a number of new points, including these:

¶ A senior defense official said there had been tests of the new version of the Soviet heavy SS-18 missile and that the tests had all been "unsuccessful." This was an apparent confirmation of new reports that the new version of the SS-18 has exploded in two test flights. The 308 SS-18 missiles already deployed are said to number and are no longer obsolescent-based missile force.

¶ The Pentagon report provided the first official confirmation of news reports that the Central Intelligence Agency had downgraded its estimate of the accuracy of the Soviet SS-19 long range missile, and that the missile is no longer deemed to be a great threat against American missile silos.

¶ The senior defense official also said that the Soviet Union was dismantling old SS-11 missiles "on a one-for-one" basis as it deployed its new SS-25 mis-

sile. The Soviet Union has said it is dismantling the missiles in order to fulfill its political commitment not to exceed the number of missiles and bombers that it had — 2,504 — when the second strategic arms treaty was signed in 1979. The United States has said that the Russians have slightly more than that number and are no longer observing the treaty.

¶ The report also said that the Soviets had aimed low-power lasers at Western surveillance aircraft and ships. The report suggested that the lasers had been used to track the craft, but could be developed into a weapon. Senior defense officials said that some "free world" airmen — not Americans — had been temporarily blinded by the lasers. Mr. Weinberger said today that such lasers had been used in Afghanistan.